

Ho Chi Minh Meets the Market: Public and Private Higher Education in Viet Nam

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The current Vietnamese higher education system is a site of contradiction, between the demands of socialism and the trend towards a market economy. While moves to extend market principles in Viet Nam continue, the role of its higher education system and its Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in promoting socialism has been retained. Significant cultural differences remain between a more entrepreneurial South, and a more conservative and cultural North. Various social, political and historical constraints have persisted to slow or prevent reforms in the higher education sector. The mix of public and private universities raises problems such as lack of resources, over-enrolment, entry standards, and especially the quality of education. Even so, and within the framework of socialism, it is likely that private sector growth will outstrip growth in the public sector in the future in an attempt to meet growing educational demand.

[Key words: higher education reform, public and private universities and quality]

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Introduction

The current Vietnamese higher education system is to some extent a site of contradiction, between the demands of socialism and the trend towards a market economy. While moves to extend market principles in Viet Nam continue, the role of its higher education system and its Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in promoting socialism has been retained. As recently as the Seventh Party Congress, for example, this message was clearly reinforced. The social sciences, were viewed as responsible for maintaining official state ideology, in a context where the Communist Party is still the only political entity

...creatively applying Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thoughts in the service of informing university faculties in economics, sociology, law, management, political science and other social science spheres (Savageau 1996).

The longstanding history of resistance to Chinese, French, Japanese and American (and allied) incursions, only ended in 1979, and has left a significant mark on Vietnamese society. Re-unification, barely thirty years old, has had a significant

effect upon the shaping of its higher education ideology and system. Despite its history of struggle against foreign incursions, the development of its higher education system was initially influenced by China, then France and the USSR, and is now increasingly influenced by western models and ideologies of higher education, notably American. China continues to be a strong, if implicit, influence, however, as in the example of 'People's Universities', below (Welch 2005).

While rises in higher education enrolments have significantly outstripped those at elementary and secondary levels, (more than doubling each year during the mid 1990s), the persistence of significant economic constraints are likely to see further growth of private higher education. Indeed, despite some problems (see below), privatisation (termed in Viet Nam 'socialisation'), is set to continue and expand over the coming decade. Nonetheless, the longstanding value placed on education means that it continues to receive strong support by both the state, and households, despite, as seen below very low levels of GDP per capita. The government, for example, has made sustained efforts to maintain or even extend the proportion of the budget devoted to education, which was estimated to be three 3.5 per cent of GDP in 1995. To this, however, must be added a further 2.5 per cent of GDP that is contributed by households and by formal cost recovery measures, thus making an impressive total of some 6 per cent of GDP (Kelly 2000). Nonetheless, for some decades Viet Nam has struggled to accommodate demand for higher education, as its secondary schools continue to 'pour out' graduates eager for places in its colleges and universities. In a culture that, as late as the 1990s, was argued still to be steeped in the legacy of Confucian mandarinism, the quest for both relevance and quality continues to be problematic, no less so with the growth of the private sector. The rise of open universities in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is a significant innovation, accounting for more than 52,000 students by 1995, while, as in China, institutional mergers have seen former specialised HEIs become part of larger, more comprehensive institutions.

Serious economic reverses hit Viet Nam in the late 1990s, although mediated to a degree by the fact that the Dong was not a fully convertible currency. Now, as the Viet Khieu remit more and more money to Viet Nam (2003 estimates were US\$3.1 billion, more than foreign direct investment, or the amount that Viet Nam receives in aid (SCMP 2005)), and growth rates average close to 7 per cent per annum, even foreign universities are establishing branch campuses (Welch 2005).

Table 1 shows that growth in GDP halved to about 4 per cent in the late 1990s, compared to the preceding seven years. Equally, Foreign Direct Investment levels fell to one third of 1996/7 levels (World Bank 2000). Despite this, significant progress was attained in reducing poverty levels, which, according to World Bank measures, fell from 58 per cent in 1993, to 37 per cent in 1998. (Viet Nam has a history of insisting on modifications to conventional structural adjustment agendas, in line with its commitment to improvements in equity (World Bank 2000: 6)). Viet Nam has now set ambitious educational targets for the next decade, as Table 2 indicates.

Table 1. Actual GDP and GDP Growth Rates, Viet Nam, 1995-1999

GDP	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Real GDP (annual % change)	9.5	9.3	8.2	3.5	4.2
Per Capita GDP (in U.S. dollars)	290	339	363	361	373

Source: IMF Country Report 01/59, Table 3: Viet Nam Selected Economic Indicators 1995-2001: 35.

Table 2. Viet Nam Education Targets 2000–2010

TARGET	2000	2010
Adult literacy rate	94%	97%
Kindergarten net enrolment	81%	98%
Net Primary enrolment	92%	98%
Primary school completion rate	66%	85-95%
Net lower Secondary enrolment	74%	90%
% of lower secondary enrolment in semi-public and private schools	-	20-40%
% of vocational training students in non-public schools	?	70%
% of higher education enrolment in semi-public and private HEIs	10%?	30%
Net upper secondary enrolment	38%	50%
% of trained working labour force	19%	42%
Higher Ed. students per 10,000	118	200
Enrolment of Masters candidates	11,727	38,000
Enrolment of Doctoral candidates	3,870	15,000
Lecturers with Masters Degrees	27%	40%
Lecturers with Doctoral Degrees	18%	25%

Source: World Bank Viet Nam 2010. *Entering the 21st. Century. Viet Nam Development Report 2001*: 62, and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, *Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001 –2010*. Ha Noi, Education Publishing House, 2002: 27.

It should be noted that if these ambitious targets are met, especially at the upper secondary level, it will only further increase the current pressure on the higher education system.

Existing disparities between the two major cities, Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh city (formerly Sai Gon) and poorer provinces such as Ha Giang, Lai Chau (a mountainous northern province with a reported literacy rate of only 49 per cent and significant gender disparities), and Quang Tri, already substantial, are at risk of being exacerbated, unless coordinated measures are implemented, particularly to assist the rural poor. Ethnic disparities also persist, with minorities accounting for some 13 per cent of the total population, but only 4 per cent of total education enrolments (Kelly 2000). Current measures of attainment in mathematics and literacy show that "... the level of attainment outside major cities like Ha Noi is poor" (Viet Nam government 2000) Evidence from 1993-98 that per capita expenditure in urban areas rose twice as fast as in rural areas, underlines the magnitude of the problem, (World Bank 2001) while in education, "...it is doubtful

whether the planned budget will be sufficient to cover the costs of the envisaged activities” (World Bank 2001: 63) Aware of these budgetary constraints, the strategy explicitly recognises the need to acquire resources from the non-state sector and households.

Historical Development of the Education System

The origins of higher learning in Viet Nam are something like 2,000 years old, and institutions of higher learning date back almost a thousand years. The first Royal College Quo Tu Giam (Temple of Literature), was established by Emperor Ly in 1076, and was heavily influenced by the classical Chinese educational model. Even at that time, public and private educational institutions co-existed, with “private schools contributing much to the dissemination of knowledge” (Dang Ba Lam 1997) Ancient influences such as Taoism, Buddhism and especially Confucianism gave rise to a Mandarin ethic which, as in its larger and often dominant neighbour China, characterized Viet Nam's earliest system of preparation in classical studies for the perpetuation of a ruling bureaucratic elite. By the time of onset of French colonial era, Vietnamese society was effectively divided into a reasonably meritocratic professional class of scholar priests, steeped in the Confucian tradition, (including detailed knowledge of Confucian texts, the “Four Books” and “Five Classics,” composition of poetry and prose, understanding of (largely Chinese) history and government, and demonstrated capacities in composing royal edicts, decrees and ceremonial texts), and the Chinese language and script; and the peasant class, wedded more to Buddhism, and largely non-literate.

European, particularly French, colonialism of the latter half of the nineteenth century introduced rapid change progressively from the South, (then called Cochinchina, and conquered by 1867), to the two northern areas known respectively as Annam and Tonkin. Change embraced the establishment of European style universities, especially after an Imperial court decision, taken in 1919, upon orders from the French. Not least among the changes was the addition of Catholicism to a largely Buddhist country, where Confucianism was confined to scholars. A further change was extending the use of the roman script form, first developed by Alexander de Rhodes in the 17th century, and used by the French in the 19th century to extend their hegemony. Nationalist resistance to French colonialism often continued to use Chinese script, with which the French were less familiar. In at least one respect, however, the French system paralleled that of the codified and centralised Mandarin style form of higher education that preceded it. The French system of the *Grandes Ecoles* that in France had, since Napoleon, cultivated the scientific, educational and administrative elites, was paralleled to a minor degree by a French style system of higher education in colonial Indochina. Especially in the early 20th century, it produced specialised graduates, almost entirely in Ha Noi. It produced graduates that, however, would need to pursue further education in metropolitan France. The radicalisation of many

of these Vietnamese students, both through their reflections upon the political tracts of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, and often via interaction with the French Communist Party, was in direct opposition to French aspirations for educated but pliant cadres. At the same time, they often felt poorly accepted by both metropolitan and local cultures. To some extent, however, it could be seen as structurally paralleling the earlier Mandarin system. A further parallel was that government service continued to offer the surest path to advancement, even if now dependent more on the favour of the colonisers.

It was during the early colonial era in 1902 that the School of Medicine and Pharmacy (the first school of higher education in Hanoi and considered to be the antecedent of the Hanoi University of Medicine) was founded, while a Teacher Training college, a College of Law and Administration and a College of Engineering were all added before 1920. Some colleges were merged in the 1920s and 1930s to form the Indochinese University, also in Hanoi. Providing for the needs of the entire Indochina area, it had enrolled some 1,200 students by 1945. The goals of colonialism, however, remained at considerable variance with the nationalist aspirations of independence-minded students.

The establishment of two Viet Nams in 1945 (the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, or DRV, in the North and the Republic of Viet Nam in the South) heralded two parallel systems of higher education. (Only after the defeat of the Americans in 1975 led to re-unification, did Viet Nam become the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (SRV).) In the former, the statist rigidities of both the classical 'Mandarin' era, and of French colonialism, arguably lent themselves rather too well to the socialist era. Nonetheless, even during the war against the French, which ended with their defeat in 1954, a Civil Engineering College and a College of Fine Arts was established (Pham Minh Hac: 151). In some ways similar to the Chinese form of socialism across the border, the Vietnamese form was, however, markedly more influenced by nationalist aspirations, and a major early effort was made to extend the use of Vietnamese as the language of instruction. Prior to reunification, in the North, nationalism mingled with Communist ideology in the reform of the higher education system, with the assistance of fellow socialist states, notably the then USSR. Total college and university enrolments in North Viet Nam increased swiftly from 8,000 to at least 50,000 between 1959 and 1975, by which time existing higher education institutions could no longer cope with the swelling ranks of secondary graduates (less than 15% of such graduates were able to be accepted into universities). As indicated below, this problem has persisted until the present day. Nonetheless, progress was impressive, with many new specialist institutions being founded, ranging from agriculture and forestry to pharmacy and medicine. By 1970, a total of 42 universities had been founded, while some 100,000 people graduated from Northern universities between 1965 and 1974, strikingly the period of greatest hostilities during the Second Indochina War. At the time of re-unification in 1975, the DRV (North Viet Nam) had 30 HEIs, all public. Pham Minh Hac cites a total enrolment of 56,000 students in 1974/5, 40 per cent of whom were women, with 8,400 academic staff, (less than 9% of whom possessed doctoral qualifications)

(Pham Minh Hac: 152). South Viet Nam, by contrast, had 14 HEIs (seven Public and seven Private, the latter often run by religious communities), and a total enrolment of 166,000 (Dang Ba Lam 1997: 7).

At the time, specific forms of foreign cooperation proved of signal importance for the development of Vietnamese higher education in the north. Prior to 1976, this largely occurred via the Council on Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). This Soviet sponsored organisation of Russian, Eastern European and other socialist states, succeeded the predominantly French influence, during which time numerous Vietnamese intellectuals gained postgraduate degrees in France. CMEA offered thousands of Vietnamese students opportunities to undertake higher degrees in socialist states; indeed it is still common to speak to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) officials, and others, who, 25 or 30 years ago, studied economics, engineering or other specialisms in the former USSR, Romania, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the USSR. Perhaps 20 to 25 per cent of all graduate students in the DRV gained their training in this way, between 1955 and 1965. Some 593 students were sent from the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV) between 1951 and 1954, and Nguyen and Sloper argued that, over the period 1961-70, some 12 Vietnamese gained their higher doctoral degrees in the USSR, and another five gained similar qualifications from the former GDR. The following decade saw further growth, with USSR doctorates rising to 25 and GDR to 18, with another four from Poland, one from Bulgaria, and one from Hungary (Nguyen Tien Dat & Sloper 1995: 119). All in all, however, the numbers were much more substantial: some 30,775 students went abroad to study between 1955 and 1975, 55 per cent of them in the USSR (Lam 1997: 11). Pham Minh Hac cites MOET figures to show that of the national total of holders of the *Kandidat Nauk*, and *Doktor Nauk* (4,500), some 3,500 gained their degrees from the former USSR (Pham Minh Hac: 163).

The defeat and departure of the Americans in 1975 heralded a more unified approach in higher education, although in practice, significant cultural differences remain between a more entrepreneurial South, and a more conservative and cultural North. (As one consequence, for example, there are today, more private 'People's' universities in the South than the North.)

The period of transformation or renovation known in Viet Nam as *Doi Moi*, dates from the mid 1980s (that is, a little after the period when China undertook a parallel process), in particular from the important Sixth Party Congress of 1986. An important part of this transformation from a state-centralised economy and society was the renovation of the Vietnamese education and training system, which suffered from most of the rigidities of a command economy. While the (MOET) was nominally in charge of the entire higher education system, in practice this was not always the case. Numerous old Soviet-style institutions existed, frequently under the control of specialised Ministries such as Agriculture, or Finance:

In 1983, only 16 universities were administered by the Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education. Others were under the auspices of

other corresponding ministries. For example, the medical schools were under the Ministry of Health, the agricultural colleges were under the Ministry of Agriculture, and colleges of architecture, under a ministry in charge of construction. (UNDP 1992)

Nevertheless, interest in higher education remained strong, and enrolments grew from 127,312 in 1986-7, to 414,183 in 1995-6 (Savageau 1996: 84).

All in all, as was pointed out as long as a decade ago, by the UNDP/UNESCO "Educational and Human Resources Sector Analysis", at least the following four factors vitiated educational progress in Viet Nam, despite high literacy rates, and a long history of great respect and enthusiasm for education (UNDP 1992).

1. Inadequate provision and coordination among higher education elements and poor linkage with research, production and employment.
2. Severe lack and low efficiency in the use of resources for education and training.
3. Inappropriate system of organisation and management in education and training.
4. The irrelevance of much of the existing higher education and training to Vietnamese society undergoing transition (Savageau 1996).

Most of these problems persist. As in Thailand and Indonesia, moves towards self-management of HEIs have been made; and as in those countries, progress has been slow and patchy.

While the founding of a Ministry of Higher, Vocational and Technical Education in 1965 had been one response to the initial problem listed above, lack of overall coordination persisted, partly due to inter-ministerial rivalries. Not until 1990 did The Ministry of General Education and the Ministry of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education merge into the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Even then, as indicated above, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) retained control of much of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) area. Just as Vietnamese politics is often riven by disputes between rival Ministries, so too in the sphere of education and training. For example, the vocational education and training (VET) area has been for some years (and continues to be) the subject of vigorous dispute between MOET and its rival the MOLISA. A further constraint was economic, in that the equipment and facilities at Vietnamese higher education institutions were often outmoded, and of poor quality, often reflecting the origins and priorities of donor countries and organisations, as much as those of Vietnamese users. This, too, continues, although to differing degrees.

Rigid and narrow specialisation, a product of the Soviet influence, meant that graduates were not always well equipped to meet the changing needs of a transitional economy, while the proliferation of smaller institutions meant that

economies of scale were non-existent, and training too narrow and specialised. Students and their teachers often still have little conception that a wider and more flexible system might well be more appropriate to their needs, as well as those of the economy. Hence, when advising applicants for development scholarship opportunities at universities abroad, Vietnamese students often insist they wish to pursue extremely narrow and rigid specialisations such as offshore petroleum exploration engineering, with little consciousness of the wider disciplinary and development context within which specialism exist.

Lack of responsiveness on the part of the higher education system was also evident in the over-production of science and technological graduates, relative to the training of technicians, who they supposedly supervised. Inevitably, this credentialism led to a decline in job satisfaction, as graduates were forced into taking jobs below the level for which they had been trained.

All in all, many of the constraints listed above persisted into the *Doi Moi* era, and slowed or prevented further reforms in the higher education sector. The *Doi Moi* reforms paralleled Perestroika and Glasnost to a degree, and the period of structural reform and opening in China. Although desire for reform was genuine, as was recognition of the limits that structural and ideological rigidities placed on development, there was never any intention to change the role of the Party as leading the masses towards socialism. Nor the continued promotion of Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought in higher education, literature, culture and the media. Thus, to the legacies of colonialism, two Indo-China wars, traditions of centralised authority, and the period of two Viet Nams, were added the tensions of retaining socialist goals in a society moving towards the market. Additional pressure for reforms leading towards a market driven economy and, by implication, liberalisation and limited democracy came from the loss of its traditional important support from Eastern Europe, notably the former USSR, and ongoing pressure from international organs such as the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. This has perpetuated some of the tensions pointed to in different elements of the Castells model.

Revisions to the educational provisions in the Vietnamese constitution in 1992, represented a retreat from the Party's intention to micro-manage the economy, and were part of a set of reforms that to some extent flowed from the UNDP Sector Analysis report of 1992. One example was institutional consolidation: by 1993, for example, Hanoi's Pedagogical University, the Foreign Language Institute and the University of Hanoi were combined to form the National University of Hanoi, which subsequently served as a model for other urban universities in Viet Nam. Considerable institutional consolidation took place over the following decade, with the total number of HEIs shrinking from 102 in 1993 to 77 in 2002 (MOET, 2002: 8). Consolidation obviously was in the public sector, since private HEIs increased in number over the period.

By 1992 also, consonant with the reform era, constitutional provisions had been amended, especially the new Article 36, which no longer claimed a monopoly in educational provision:

The State shall ensure the harmonious development of the educational system: pre-school education, general education, vocational training, college and post-graduate education; it shall enforce the generalization of primary education, eliminate illiteracy; it shall develop various educational institutions: State-run schools, people-run schools, and others. The State gives priority investment to education and encouragement to other investors. (Savageau 1996)

By about this time, the first *dan lap* or ‘People-established’ universities had been created, notably, in the North, Dong Do, Phuong Dong and Thang Long universities. After a hesitant beginning, eight such “People’s” HEIs had been established by 1995 in Viet Nam, almost all with a restricted core of offerings, largely cohering around mathematics, IT, and business studies (Tran Kieu & Nguyen Huu Chau 2000: 225). (The current total number of public universities and colleges in Viet Nam is more than 55, excluding specialist colleges for the Army, and Home Affairs Ministry, but including specialist colleges for minorities.) The first of these “People’s” universities was Thang Long, in Ha Noi, founded in 1988, but by 1995, more such private HEIs existed in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Sai Gon) than in Ha Noi, with an additional institution in Da Nang. MOET figures for 2002 list 17 such *Ngoai cong lap dai hoc* or ‘non-public’ universities. In addition, six *Ngoai cong lap cao dang*, or non-public colleges are listed. The distinction is largely between those HEIs that offer a four year qualification, termed universities, and those which offer shorter cycle associate type degrees, sometimes now termed in English junior colleges or community colleges.

A significant index of how sensitive this issue of reforming the mix of public and private universities continues to be in contemporary Viet Nam, can be seen in the careful choice of terminology with which to officially describe it. Privatisation is clearly at odds with a socialist ideology, hence is termed “socialisation.” (This can mean a substantial change at the resource level, however—it has recently been claimed, for example, that “... in many places, 50 per cent of the primary education budget (is) contributed by the people and local budget” (Tran and Nguyen 2000: 226)). Equally, the use of the term “People’s University”, (rather like their structural equivalent in China, the *Minban*) avoids the un-wished for term ‘private’ university. Despite this carefully elaborated official discourse, the People’s universities are entirely dependent on fees and donations, since they attract no government grants. There is also an intermediary category of institution, *ban cong* or ‘semi-public’, which is usually established by government grant, and managed by a public authority at central, province or district level, but which is dependent on student fees for its operational costs.

While some “People’s universities” may attract a government grant of land, or at least permission to purchase or lease land at a subsidised rate, one of the more well known People’s Universities in the North, Thang Long University, for example, claims that it is still waiting for a government promise of this kind to be fulfilled—and in any event, lacks the funds for such a purchase, even if it were to become available.

Total current enrolments by category are seen in Table 3 which, as well as the size of the public and private sectors, also gives an idea of the relative under-representation of women and minorities in higher education.

Table 3. Higher Education Enrolments by institution & category (2000/1 & 2001/2)

Students	College 2000/1	University 2000/1	Total 2000/1	College 2001/2	University 2001/2	Total 2001/2
Female	91,457	309,506	400,963	103,323	328,000	431,323
Minority	1,817	1,425	3,242	2,229	1,787	4,016
Public	171,922	642,041	813,963	192,466	680,663	873,129
Non-Public	14,801	89,464	104,265	18,397	82,593	100,990
Full Time	148,893	403,568	552,461	167,476	411,721	579,197
In-Service	19,819	223,837	243,656	24,478	251,600	276,078
Other	18,011	104,100	122,111	18,909	99,935	118,844
Graduate Students	45,757	117,353	163,110	47,133	121,804	168,937
TOTAL	186,723	731,505	918,228	210,863	763,256	974,119

Source: Education and Training in Viet Nam 2002, MOET 2002, Information Section, MOET 2002

While it is clear that there is a degree of double counting in some of the above categories (a student may be counted as Female but also Minority), it is clear that higher education enrolments are continuing to grow strongly, and private sector enrolments particularly so, as Table 4 reveals.

Table 4. Enrolments, Public Semi-Public and Private HEIs (1996/7–1998/9)

Type of HEI	Number 1996/7	% 1996/7	Number 1997/8	% 1997/8	Number 1998/9	% 1998/9
Public	525,596	88.50	631,994	88.35	696,375	87.17
Semi Public	42,448	7.15	37,518	5.25	33,254	4.16
People’s	25,840	4.35	45,719	6.39	69,288	8.67
TOTAL	593,884	100.00	715,321	100.00	798,817	100.00

Source: Information Section MOET 2002.

What is clear from the above is that, while growth in the public sector is still strong, relative growth rates are much stronger in the “People’s” category, while the somewhat anomalous semi-public category seems to be fading in significance. Effectively, private sector HEIs doubled their share of enrolments over the three years covered in Table Four. Putting the information in the preceding two tables together, it seems reasonable to predict that relative growth in private sector HEIs

will continue to outstrip that in the public sector over the foreseeable future. On this account, the apparent fall in private sector HEI enrolments from 2001 to 2002 is something of an anomaly, or perhaps an outcome of the MOET crackdown.

Current and Future Challenges

Viet Nam is a poor country, and some of the challenges it faces in higher education are a product of that fact. The current GDP per capita is still low, the rate of malnutrition among children, for example, is still a very high 41 per cent, (Tran & Nguyen 2000: 234) and in the light of such circumstances, and ongoing economic difficulties, it is not surprising that there are clear limits to what can be achieved by the state. It is thus all the more impressive that the proportion of the state budget devoted to education rose from 8 per cent in 1990 to a claimed 15 per cent in 2000 (Tran & Nguyen 2000: 235). While economic growth rates slowed in the late 1990s, Viet Nam was insulated to a degree from the regional economic crisis, since among other things, it did not have a fully convertible currency. While annual growth rates slipped below 5 per cent in the last two years of the previous century, these have now risen again to significantly higher levels. North South differences persist, and development in Ho Chi Minh City has outstripped much of the rest of the country—a city of some seven million inhabitants, it now accounts for 18.4 per cent of national GDP, and GDP growth for 2004 was 11.6 per cent. Foreign investment increased by some 40 per cent in 2004, with Hong Kong being the largest investors. Services such as banking and tourism are expected to reach 50 per cent of the local economy in 2005. Ho Chi Minh City leaders already give industry a back seat to the services sector (SCMP 2005).

As indicated above, for some decades Viet Nam has been unable to provide anything like sufficient higher education places to cater for qualified secondary graduates. At the same time, educational quality has also been a longstanding problem. To some extent the two problems collide, as is well recognised domestically:

In education and training in Viet Nam at present there are two conflicting requirements: on the one hand, the demand for rapid expansion of the scale of provision, and on the other hand, the requirement to improve the quality of provision. These two demands are legitimate, but the education sector's capacities are limited (Tran & Nguyen 2000: 235).

The limitations of a generally hidebound pedagogical tradition represent one threat to quality. In general within the Vietnamese system, 'programme, text books and study materials continue to be major... issues.' (Tran & Nguyen 2000: 227), while a rather stolid pedagogy has also often been a limitation on teaching and learning:

One major shortcoming in the recent past has been a lack of measures to reform the teaching method, which is still quite conservative – the teacher reads, the pupils take notes; the main reliance is upon memory instead of

thinking, study is passive. There is a serious shortage of ... equipment to renovate the method of teaching and learning (Tran & Nguyen 2000: 227).

Another is the training of academic staff, many of whom gained their postgraduate qualifications, if any, decades ago in Eastern Europe, and have had little change to update their expertise since, especially since the collapse of support schemes from those former socialist, sister states. Some idea of the limits on staff quality can be gained from Table 5.

Table 5. Number of Academic Staff, by Degree, Viet Nam, 2000/1 and 2001/2

Degree Held	Numbers of Staff 2000/1	% of total 2001/2	Numbers of Staff 2001/2	% of total 2001/2
Doctoral Degree*	4,454	18.28	4,812	19.75
Masters	6,596	27.07	7,583	31.12
Professional Qualification	569	2.40	586	2.40
Uni/College qualification	12,422	50.73	12,361	50.73
Other	321	1.31	204	0.83
TOTAL	24,362	100.00	25,546	100.00

* This is likely to include both the qualifications Doktor Nauk, and Kandidat Nauk.

Source: Education and Training in Viet Nam 2002, MOET 2002: 8.

It can be seen from the above that, even allowing for the fact that it is likely that both *Doktor* and *Kandidat* degrees have been aggregated in the doctoral category, less than 20 per cent of Vietnamese academics have this level of qualification, and only 30 per cent the lesser Masters qualification.

By 2002, some of these People's universities, notably (in the North) Thang Long and Dong Do, had been established for more than a decade, the latter proudly indicating that, for the first time it had succeeded in filling all 1,000 places allocated to it by the MOET. The ongoing pressure on the public system, which can still only find places for at most 10 per cent of qualified secondary graduates, means that the future demand for private higher education is likely to remain strong, and MOET plans are for the private higher education sector to assume 30 per cent of total higher education enrolments by 2010. The current proportion is 11 per cent (Strategic Plan: 10). Nonetheless, if private higher education is to expand, quality control will be paramount, and, despite recent legislation that stipulates the means whereby "People's" universities can be instituted, their financial management, that they must regularly scrutinise their own activities and be periodically supervised and inspected by MOET¹, it is not clear that a robust and rigorous mechanism of quality assurance is actually in operation. A study is being undertaken of the issues involved.

Meanwhile, serious problems have surfaced in at least some of the private HEIs. At least two difficulties are apparent, both raised in the course of the current official police investigation of the Rector and other senior staff at Dong Do University. Each also arguably relates to their status as non-state institutions, ineligible for public funds. The first issue is that of over-enrolment, in a situation where MOET sets legally defined enrolment limits for such institutions. Dong Do was accused of

substantially exceeding its quota, and an official investigation launched by MOET indeed confirmed that it had over-enrolled—to the tune of 2.8 times its MOET quota. Thus for the academic year 2001/2 alone, Dong Do had enrolled 4,205 students, rather than its allotted 1,500. Curiously, however, the problems had been known for some years: The Dong Do University scandal first surfaced in October 1998 when officials of the Ministry of Education and Training found that the number of students admitted to the university far surpassed the permitted figure (*Viet Nam News* 2002, June 19).

The second issue is one of entry standards. This is of importance in a system where overall quality is still problematic. Whereas state universities accept entry level students whose aggregate of their three best subjects, each with a possible total of 10, totals around 20 or so, it is said that some People's universities are accepting students with lower scores, perhaps 15 or even less. While this may be seen as simply an issue of quality, it was alleged in 2001 that the leaders of Dong Do People's University had been routinely accepting bribes by students or their families, in order to secure entry to the institution. This, too, is strictly illegal, and may well be weakening the quality of the student cohort even further, but allegedly occurred, in an effort to boost numbers of enrolments and income levels.

The official MOET investigation did indeed uncover substantial breaches of mandated procedures. Some papers were given marks of eight or nine out of ten, at times by unqualified markers, when their real grade was assessed at as low as half a mark. Several dozen students were accepted for enrolment without even being on the list of students for selection. Another 380 had no upper secondary graduation certificates at all. All in all, some 80 per cent of students accepted for enrolment at Dong Do were found to have scores lower than that reported by the university Council, while some had had their marks increased by re-scoring. Beyond these serious breaches of procedure, the investigating team also found that the university had failed to build any facilities, offices or classrooms in seven years of operation, or to invest in enhancing the quality of academic staff. Facilities were assessed as not meeting the standards of a university.²

As a result of this investigation, Dong Do's 2002 enrolments were deemed to be cancelled, and the university was given strict instructions to end such illegal practices. The Ha Noi police were called in to conduct an investigation, and if necessary, proceed to prosecutions against the Rector and other senior staff responsible. The Deputy Chair of its board of management was subpoenaed "... for his involvement in of the biggest scandals to date in the education sector" (*Viet Nam News* 2002, June 19). The former director of its Training Department was also charged in relation to the affair.

At times, too, 'gamekeeper has turned poacher'. In a separate case in 2002, two senior MOET officials, both at Deputy Minister level, were reprimanded or punished, after their involvement in the 'Asia International University' scam was revealed. Both officials were linked with the "...bogus university, which set up shop

in Viet Nam, and enrolled thousands, awarding worthless paper degrees” (*Viet Nam News* 2002, October 7).

Other People’s Universities seem more reputable. Thang Long, for example, initiated in the South in 1988 as a ‘university centre’ and accredited by MOET in the same year, was established on a non-profit basis, (Hoang Suan Xinh & Sloper 1995: 201) and is now a full-fledged university in Ha Noi, with three Faculties (Business Administration, Maths and IT, and Foreign Languages). Its total enrolment is currently 2877 students. Management is by far the largest faculty. Its board or council consists of some well-known figures in Vietnamese higher education, and more than one of its senior staff are or have been associated with a major public university.

Some 50 per cent of its teaching is undertaken by staff from such public HEIs. While academic moonlighting is by no means uncommon, this ongoing problem for Vietnamese higher education also raises significant issues of quality. Salaries for public sector HEI academic staff are low, and it is by no means uncommon for individuals to undertake a second job, or have a small business, in addition to their main employment. In order to counter this practice, some larger HEIs “...provide supplements out of fees” (*Viet Nam Public Expenditure Review* 2000:170).

Adding to the financial plight of public sector HEIs, is the fact that the share of overall education expenditure allocated to higher education, has fallen significantly—from 16 per cent in 1992 to 13 per cent in 1998. Table 6, shows the changing balance in proportions of expenditures from various sources in higher education, in the mid to late 1990s.

Table 6. Changes in Proportions of Expenditure, Higher and Vocational Education, 1993-98

Higher and Vocational Education	1993	1998
Public Subsidies	71	46
Charges to Public	9	18
Direct Costs to Parents	20	36
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: Viet Nam Public Sector Expenditure Review. Joint Report of the Government of Viet Nam–Donor Working Party on Public Expenditure Review. (Mid Year Meeting Report). Ha Noi, 2000: 61.

As can be seen in the table, government support for public HEIs plunged over the 1990s, while direct costs to parents soared. Kelly cites figures showing a substantial mismatch between enrolment growth, and growth of expenditures, with the latter rising from 117 per cent from 1993 and 1995, but the former by a much more modest 63 per cent (Kelly 2000: 3). Charges to the community doubled. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to note a parallel government pledge to raise spending on education to some 15 per cent of the state budget, by 2000 (Kelly 2000: 1).

In the context described above, the enticement for public-sector academics of working at a private, fee-paying HEI may well be substantial, and can certainly offer

a significant income boost to the individual concerned. Private HEIs may pay a relatively handsome hourly rate, for “well trained professors from the public sector... and this damages the interests of the public HE sector”. According to Thiep, the differentials can be dramatic: perhaps 15-20,000 Dong for an hour of instruction at a public HEI, compared with perhaps 50-70,000 Dong at a private HEI. In practice, it means that the quality of teaching at each institution may suffer, as well as time available for students. Certainly, some public HEIs begrudge the time and energy spent away from their full-time job by some of their academic staff, pursuing a parallel, part time appointment at a “People’s” university. Peer resentment, by less fortunate colleagues, is also common.

Of the 54 teaching staff at Thang Long, seven have Ph.Ds., a further 32 have a masters qualification, while another three are undertaking doctoral studies. A five-storey building has been rented for the academic year 2002/3, and the university has ambitions to grow and become more prestigious. A very senior Thang Long academic indicated that, until 2002, it had never filled its annual quota of 1,000 students, because it has insisted on maintaining high entry standards. Fees are modestly set at around 1million Dong per trimester, or a little over US\$200 per annum, and the university seeks to ensure that poverty is not a barrier to entry. In practice, however, resources are modest and it only grants five scholarships per annum. In general one can say that fees within private sector HEIs is about 50 per cent higher than that in public sector HEIs. Staff student ratios at Thang Long are said to be 1: 28, although it is not clear how representative this is of the sector.

Thang Long Graduates are said to be in high demand, and students must maintain a solid academic performance level, in order to retain their place at the university. Despite its location in the North, where it is admitted that “people have no clear idea of private education... [and] seldom have families abroad” [who can assist with fees] (Hoang Xuan Sinh & Sloper 1995: 203-4), it is continuing to grow and mature. Support from the Vietnamese diaspora was important in the early years, (but has been of greater significance in the development of private HEIs in the south of Viet Nam), and it continues to receive support from the *Institut Supérieur de Gestion* in Paris, in the form of training provided for Thang Long professors in Paris, or sending books and French advisers.

All in all, the dynamic private sector seems set to grow. When hard-pressed public sector HEIs can only find places for about 10 per cent of secondary graduates, such growth is predictable. At the same time, problems abound. Although MOET has now set up teams to investigate the operation of such HEIs, to ensure that additional staff are hired when enrolments rise, and that institutions do not exceed their allotted quota, the regulatory system in general is weak, and perhaps arbitrary on occasion. Corruption, a rising concern in contemporary Viet Nam, may also be a problem, as in the example above. On the other hand, private sector HEIs complain they are over-regulated, compared to their peers in public HEIs, who get far more resources for their work. As indicated above, private HEIs receive no financial aid from the government.

Quality

Issues of quality of higher education are not limited to the private sector, however. Indeed, certain system-wide weaknesses have been pointed out for years, (Thiep 1995) and remain a problem. Despite significant efforts to provide some upgrading for academic staff, (it was claimed in 1996 that some 30 per cent of staff had availed themselves of some professional development in the preceding years), only a modest 6 per cent of the national research budget is applied to this task (Dang Ba Lam 1997: 8). Difficulties in providing professional development are again acknowledged in the Education Development Strategic Plan (2002): “In particular, the academic staff of higher education rarely have opportunities for regularly updating their knowledge and accessing ...new scientific and technological achievements of the world.” This limitation on staffing quality is only exacerbated by the current retirement of significant numbers of the academic profession, leading to significant shortages, especially in key areas such as IT and Business, where the material rewards are far greater outside of higher education. Progress in establishing a solid regulatory regime has been slow and piecemeal and it is only in 2002 that a quality assurance unit was established by MOET. World Bank resources have been made available to establish the process, and the government has also injected some resources, and indicated that institutions that comply will be rewarded (perhaps with land grants).

The low quality of graduates is also a common complaint. The fact that graduate unemployment is still a widespread problem is often said to be linked to the indifferent quality of many graduates, the lack of responsiveness by certain institutions to the actual needs of employers and industries, as also the outmoded curriculum of many courses. Although the quality of entrants to public HEIs is still higher than that in private institutions, there are claims that at least some private HEI graduates are more sought after in the job market, as their curricula is at times more responsive to actual industry needs. The rise of Open enrolments at a number of universities, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, (often in an effort to raise funds for the HEI), also weakened quality, since entry was based on wealth.

Students access to these courses was based on their ability to pay fees, in some cases almost irrespective of the academic credentials. ... Students who completed the open mode degree received a graduation diploma endorsed with the words ‘mo rong’. These degrees did not usually have a high status, and were not normally accepted for entry to postgraduate programs. (Kelly 2000: 7)

Resources

The current climate is a harsh one for higher education, and nowhere does the chill winds of financial austerity blow more keenly than in the developing world. As revealed above, Viet Nam is no exception, and given the increasing mismatch between spiralling demand, and relative diminution in government support (see Table 6, above), it is no surprise to find that public sector HEIs in Viet Nam have had no recourse but to develop other sources of income. Sang and Sloper showed

that Colleges and Universities were already supplying substantial proportions of their budget (from four to 28%) from ‘other sources’ in the early 1990s (Sang & Sloper 1995: 174), and there is little evidence to show that this pattern has done anything but broaden and intensify. Citing the Viet Nam example, Bray has argued that the scale of such income generation chiefly depends on:

- the product or service that can be provided (which does not always relate to the primary mission of the institutions)
- the entrepreneurial capability and culture within the institution, and
- the state of institutional infrastructure—personnel, organisational and technical—which creates the basis for delivering a desired product or service (Bray 2002: 10).

Of course, HEIs with a faculty profile that can more easily be turned to account, or located close to industries and in large population centres, will be best able to take advantage of this changing climate. Smaller or poorer HEIs, those in rural areas away from the reach of industries, or offering subjects that cannot easily be turned into commercial training contracts, or strategic research initiatives, will suffer accordingly. Nonetheless rural Vietnamese HEIs rural institutions also have opportunities to supplement revenues, as Bray indicates: raising poultry, producing vegetables, managing restaurants, and making clothes. While on the one hand, such activities deflect academics from their core missions as teachers and scholars, it must also be acknowledged that such activities at least sustain the institution. Fees, which in ‘People’s’ universities range from around 2.5m to 4.5m Dong per annum, are significantly lower in public HEIs, but are continuing to increase in each sector. Fees at Ha Noi Economics, for example, are around 1.5m Dong annually, but less prestigious HEIs in rural areas charge much less.

The introduction of fees, while relatively modest by international standards, has a disproportionate effect on poorer citizens, often in rural areas. “Social equality has not yet been realised. Children from poor families encounter many difficulties in continuing their studies” (Dang Ba Lam 1997: 11). The effects are clear. While full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers rose by an annual 16 per cent from 1996-98 (a total rise of 55%) total revenues rose more slowly, while the “growth of revenues from government has declined significantly” (Viet Nam Public Expenditures Review 2000: Vol. 2 Annexes, p. 166). In fact by 1998, it had virtually plateaued. “Fees in 1998 accounted for about 36 per cent of total revenues, compared with 24 per cent three years previously.” Revenues per student declined from almost 3,500 in 1996 to little more than 2,500 in 1998 (Ibid: 167). Over the same period, staff student ratios declined from 1:18 to 1:25, a difference of 39 per cent, largely accounted for by a substantial rise in teaching hours per staff member, from about three hundred and fifty hours to around four hundred and ten.

Devolution, Regulation and Private Higher Education

It is apparent from the above, that there is a real need for a rigorous regulatory regime to promote quality improvement in higher education, not least among private HEIs. While measures have been introduced in recent years to regulate and provide some financial incentives for the development of private HEIs, quality control is not yet all that it should be, as the examples of Dong Do and Asian International University attest. It is also clear, that in a climate of financial austerity, there is a degree of institutional resistance within some public sector HEIs towards moves to extend self-governance, and the parallel moves to increase budgetary responsibilities at the institutional level.

International Influences and Alliances

A major priority for Viet Nam in the coming years is to raise quality and extend access via international alliances and initiatives. This is part of a wider issue of how Viet Nam deals with its substantial diaspora, (now calculated at around 2.7 million worldwide), significant sections of which (rather like Cuba) are stringently opposed to the current government. Notwithstanding these difficulties, substantial foreign direct investment is occurring, and remittances from overseas Vietnamese have risen spectacularly:

The overall inflow from *Viet Khieu* has doubled in recent years, rising to US\$3.1 billion in 2003, and US\$6 billion in 2006 (*New York Times* 2006)—it “now outstrips the amount Viet Nam receives in either foreign aid or international investment”. (See also SCMP 2005a, Welch 2005)

While evidence is unsystematic, it is clear that some of this money supports higher education enrolments.

Specific decrees such as the recent No. 18 and No. 6, regulate the establishment of overseas providers in Viet Nam, and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) must also give its approval in each case.

Three examples indicate the diversity of international influences and effects. Based on a longstanding presence and history of cooperation with local partners in Viet Nam, the Australian Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) established a purpose built campus in Ho Chi Minh City, (with the aid of a US\$20m injection of funds from the US based Atlantic Philanthropy). It currently offers, *inter alia*, a short-term CELTA-accredited English language teaching course at a fee of almost A\$2,500 (around US\$1,400). Fees for its full-time MBA programme are US\$6,000 per year, a substantial sum in Viet Nam. Nonetheless, ambitious growth targets have already been met—2006 figures show an enrolment growth of 40 per cent, to some three thousand EFTS, and plans for 2007 are for further growth, of 30 per cent. According to its President and CEO, Michael Mann, (former Ambassador to Viet Nam), RMIT Viet Nam is currently the largest employer of foreigners in the country, with a total of one hundred and twenty (Mann 2006).

Another form of internationalisation is twinning, such as has existed for almost a decade between two Vietnamese universities, (Ha Noi Economics and Ho Chi Minh Economics), and the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands. Founded as a donor program in 1994, the two-year course graduates 60 students a year, using Dutch, Vietnamese and other international teaching staff. Six million guilders (about US\$3m) was shared by each of the two Vietnamese campuses from 1998, but as aid and teaching support from Holland has gradually been phased out, the course, taught entirely in English, has moved from full-time to part time, to cater both for local employed Vietnamese students, as also others who may be on mission for an agency, or employed in Viet Nam on a commercial contract.

A less successful venture has been by Ha Noi Economics with the United Kingdom Henley Management Centre. While five classes, with a total enrolment of about one hundred, exist in Viet Nam, including in Sai Gon, the original fee of US\$ 15,000 was found to be too high, which a subsequent reduction to US\$13,500 did little to remedy. Staff at Ha Noi Economics School of Business also felt that there was insufficient support by the United Kingdom institution, and has now terminated the arrangement, preferring to pursue a cooperative arrangement with the Australian Swinburne University, that has been much more ready to provide substantial support. Websites of overseas institutions are becoming more important in recruiting Vietnamese students, and the British Council launched a bi-lingual education website in 2002, to inform students interested in studying in the United Kingdom (*Viet Nam News* 2002, 7 October).

Brain Drain

Some 15,000 Vietnamese students study abroad each year, and the government now encourages families who can afford to do so, to send their children abroad for further studies. By no means all return at the end of their studies and brain drain is a longstanding and significant issue. In addition, the government has sent thousands of students abroad. The SRV has recently introduced a special scheme to encourage study abroad opportunities for its younger talent. Each year, 400 students are given scholarships to study abroad, in areas deemed to be of high national priority (such as IT, Maths, and the Sciences). Each student is supported to the tune of US\$35,000 annually, which is to cover both fees and living expenses. Students are legally obliged to return and work for the state at the conclusion to their studies, and their families incur a hefty penalty, for non-compliance with this provision. In practice, few fail to return, but not all remain in the public sector, with some transferring to private firms in Viet Nam.

Other countries also provide development scholarships to enable Vietnamese students to study at HEIs abroad. A total of 298 such postgraduate scholarships were made available in 1996, rising to 315 in 1997, and 341 in 1998. Of these Australia provides around 80 per year, while Japan provides another 19 (25 in 1998). Total scholarships offered by various countries are shown in the Table 7.

Table 7. Study Abroad Scholarships, by Country, year 2000

Country	Number of Scholarships provided
Canada	10
United Kingdom	70
France	200
Australia	150
Thailand	70 short + 10 long term
Japan	60
United States	30 (Masters) Fellowships.
TOTAL	600

Source: Kelly, 2000: 11.

In addition, perhaps twice this total are offered scholarships direct by overseas HEIs, foundations, or corporations, and thousands more were either on institutional scholarships, or financing themselves abroad. Statistics indicate that 1,400 students were enrolled in Australian universities in the year 2000, for example, while in the USA, after a post 1975 surge in enrolments, numbers fell appreciably, such that by 1993, numbers had declined to less than 1,000, rising subsequently to 1,500 or so in 1997 (Kelly 2000: 12).

Of these, however, not all return (WTO 2006), and the UNDP sponsored *Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals* (TOKTEN) programme, was developed in the 1990s to attract skilled and educated expatriates to return to Viet Nam to teach, train, and work, at least for a specific term, with the option of returning to their adopted country, upon completion. Resources are however, modest.

Changing the Balance, Blurring the Borders

Paralleling the process whereby public sector HEIs become more self governing, and more responsible for significant components of their budgets, some public HEIs are likely to be transformed into private, over the coming decade. As indicated, it is planned that by 2010, "...the number of non-public university and college students shall represent 30 per cent of the total" (Decision 47/2001 QD-TTg 4 April 2001). As well, Viet Nam's accession to membership of WTO in January 2007, included, as part of its Service Sector commitment, provisions for joint ventures with overseas partners, (which can be majority foreign owned, and from 2009, the prospect of 100% foreign ownership). While this commitment is commendably open, it will increase pressures on domestic regulatory agencies that will need to be able to sort the genuine initiatives from diploma mills and other less worthy ventures.

In general, then, as with several other Southeast Asian states, issues arise from the increasing blurring of the borders between the public and private sectors. If the higher education sector is to be opened to foreign competition, and public sector HEIs are to be either formally transformed into private institutions, or so reformed that they conform more and more to the logic of business, as the World Bank recommends for Viet Nam, what will be the implications for access and equity? The

World Bank Development Report for 2001 argues that whereas “government has responsibility to ensure universal education,...private parties may play a role in the provision and financing of higher education” (World Bank, Viet Nam Development Report 2001: 62).

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¹Such as Decision 86/2000/QĐ-TTg, of July 18, 2000, and the associated 'Resolution on People founded universities', of the same date.

²Summary based on a survey of *Lao Dong* (Labour) newspaper, (<http://www.laodong.com.vn>) between December 2001, and September 2002.